

Kerry: U.S. Must 'End the Empire of Oil'

Kerry who?

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Northern Ireland -- Sen. John Kerry said Sunday that the United States must rebuild the power of the United Nations and help "end the empire of oil" to defeat terrorism.

Kerry, who lost to President Bush in the 2004 presidential election, avoided explicit criticism of the U.S. administration during a wide-ranging speech on the global dynamics of terrorism. But he said Bush's policy of imposing democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan risked looking like a crusade in Arab, Muslim eyes.

"If it is seen as the result of an army marching through Muslim lands, it will fail," Kerry told an audience at the University of Ulster in Londonderry, the second-largest city in Northern Ireland.

The "war on terror," Kerry said, was not principally about the U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, but was "fundamentally a war within Islam for the heart and soul of Islam, stretching from Morocco east to Indonesia." He said terrorist threats against the West and within Muslim nations exist in part because "no center of moral authority has emerged to stop those who would murder in the name of Islam."

But Kerry suggested the current focus on American-led military interventions was not the way to promote stable democracies in the Middle East, a region of dictatorships underpinned by oil money. Sustainable political change required concerted international political pressure combined with appropriate development aid.

"Great American presidents, from Roosevelt to Truman to Kennedy, understood that success requires a community of nations working together, drawing strength from shared sacrifice and steadfast commitment to our shared ideals," he said.

He added that "great alliances" should be formed again and "that means strengthening and reforming _ not weakening and walking away from _ the ability of the UN to play a forceful role in troubled places like Iraq and Darfur."

Kerry, D-Mass., said unified pressure from the democracies of Europe, Asia and the Americas would be more effective "to counter the teaching of hatred in madrassas (Muslim religious schools) throughout the Middle East. ... And we must work with moderate Muslims, especially clerics, to permanently discredit the belief that the murder of innocents can be justified in the name of God, race, or nation."

Kerry said developing effective replacements for oil-based fuels also was key. The West's appetite for petroleum from the Middle East "has frustrated every impulse towards modernization of the region, while giving its regimes the resources to hold onto power. The international community of democratic nations cannot afford to continue funding both sides of the war on terror. We must end the empire of oil."

Bush has proposed a 22 percent increase in funding for the government's clean-energy research. He has said he wants to focus on nuclear, solar and wind power as well as better batteries to power hybrid-electric autos and hydrogen-fueled cars.

Critics of the administration's energy policies say Bush's proposals are modest, and that the president is responding to polls that show his job approval numbers are hampered in part because Americans are concerned about the high gasoline and utility prices.